SOCIAL MOVEMENT People march in the street before the 1979 Iranian Revolution. *Wiki Creative Commons photo*

A SOCIAL MOVEMENT APPROACH TO
UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE BY DOOWAN LEE

Introduction

Events in the Arab Spring have underscored the importance of mass social mobilization in disrupting or even toppling regimes. In this paper, I argue that we can enhance the operational flexibility and strategic utility of unconventional warfare by incorporating the logic of social mobilization and understanding of how to leverage existing social infrastructure. Empirically, UW-relevant lessons from the Arab Spring and other resistance movements are distilled to support the main argument.

This paper will define key definitions of social movement, social revolution and unconventional warfare to illustrate why incorporating social mobilization can give UW more operational flexibility. It will also synthesize the three concepts to identify the strengths and drawbacks of a social movement approach to UW. Finally, we will delineate major components of social-movement theory to inform UW planners on how to foment a resistance movement capable of garnering popular support as well as waging guerrilla warfare, and illustrating how the social-movement approach can be operationalized for UW campaigns.

Conceptual Synthesis

Social movement can be defined as "collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities."[1] Note that the definition underscores the organizational and ideological (common purpose and solidarity) aspects of collective action. On the other hand, social revolution can be defined as "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures, accompanied and in part accomplished through popular revolts from below."[2] The American Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution and the Iranian Revolution are good examples of this definition. While social movements shed light on potential forms of mobilization, the definition of social revolution highlights what types of outcomes are possible through collective action.

The current approved definition of UW is "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow an occupying power or government by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in
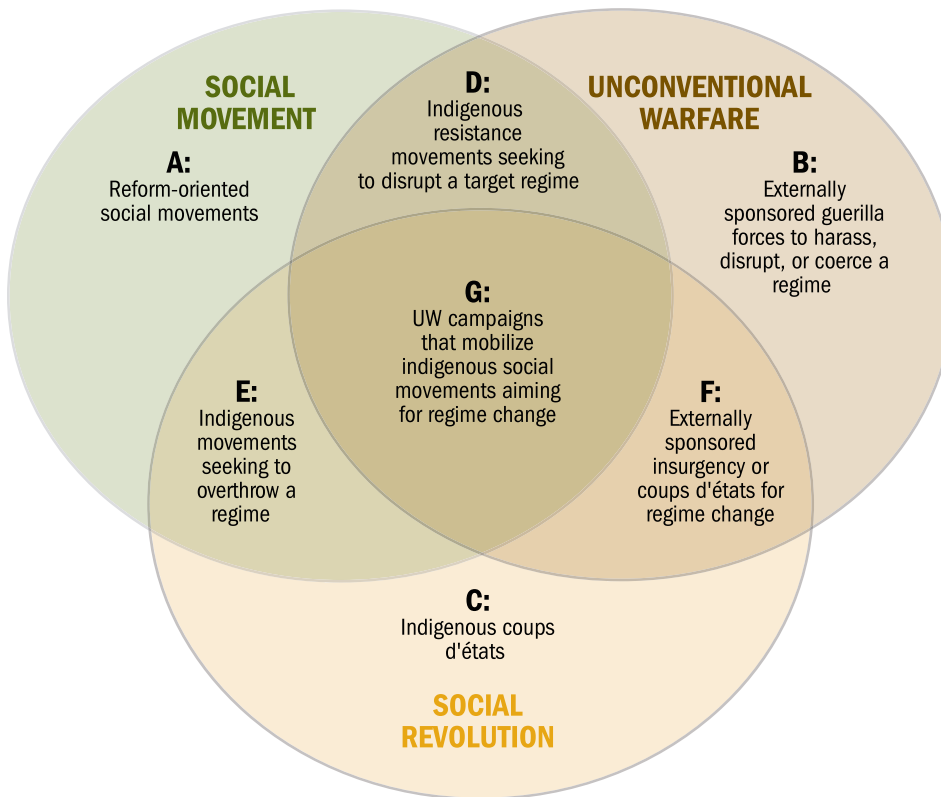
FIGURE 1 Social Revolution, Social Movement and Unconventional Warfare.
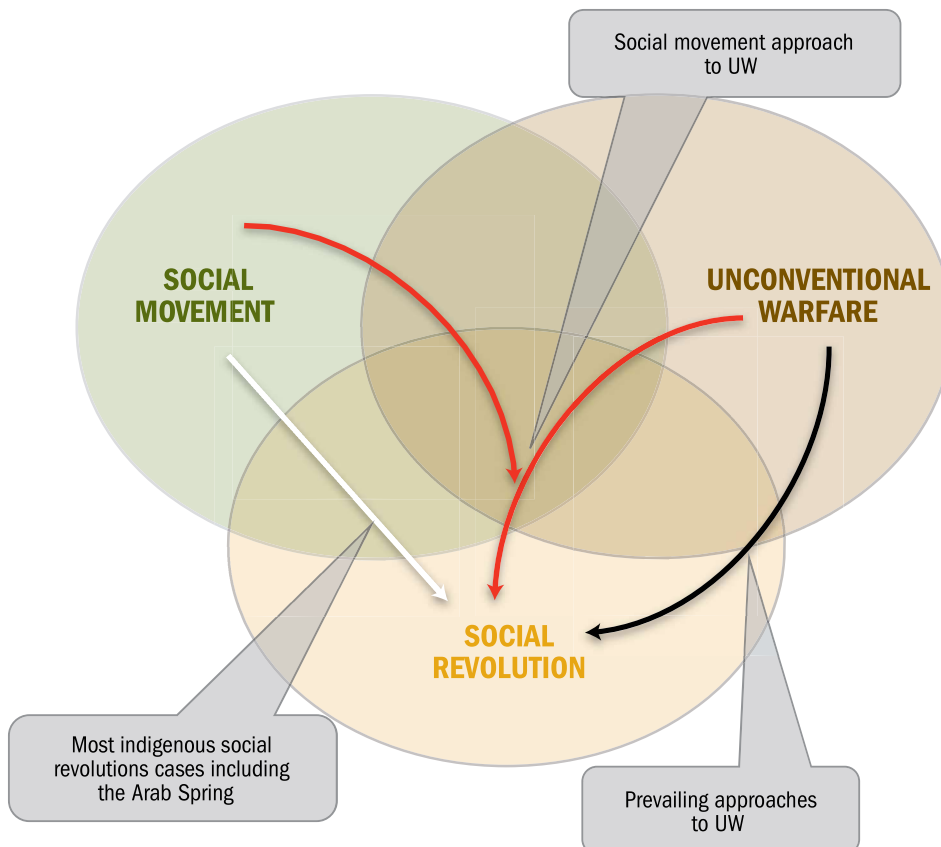
FIGURE 2 Social Movement Approach and Prevailing Approaches.

a denied area."[3] Some of the examples that fit this definition include the Tibetan resistance movement in the '50s and '60s, Operation Ajax, the White Tigers, regime-change campaigns in South America and the anti-Soviet movement in Afghanistan.

While these definitions may indicate conceptually separate domains, overlaying them provides an illustrative framework to examine how social movement, social revolution and UW relate to one another.

Figure 1 illustrates how the three concepts relate to one another with mutually exclusive and overlapping sections. What happened in Tunisia and Egypt would fall in the intersection of social movement and social revolution where an indigenous social movement led to a fundamental regime change, akin to social revolution (E).[4] Historical examples for the intersection between UW and social revolution include Operation Ajax, the 1963 South Vietnamese Coup, 1974 Chilean Coup, 1976 Argentine Coup and Che Guevara in Bolivia (F). The center area is where social movement, social revolution and UW all overlap (G). Conceptually, this intersection represents UW campaigns that mobilize indigenous social movements in order to overthrow a regime or government. Approximate examples that fall in the intersection of the three definitions include the solidarity movement in Poland, Hezbollah and Tibet from 1955 through the 1970s.

Prevailing Approaches

The utility of social-movement theory stems from strategic drawbacks associated with externally sponsored insurgencies or coup d'états, or what I call the prevailing approaches. Figure 2 depicts the dynamics of the social-movement approach compared to the prevailing models.

First, the prevailing approaches tend to have a poor track record in terms of the durable influence of the U.S. One of the most cited examples of a U.S.-sponsored coup is Operation Ajax. In some ways, Operation Ajax in Iran can be considered operationally successful. After all, it gave the U.S. a relatively stable partner for 26 years. However, the coup proved costly in terms of strategic durability. The coup caused long-lasting damage to the U.S. reputation as its ties to the U.S. and the U.K. quickly became a rally point for anti-West sentiments.[5] The Shah's limited political legitimacy and social pen-

etration ultimately led to the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Considering the impact of the revolution on the region and the prevalence of anti-colonialist narrative that undergirds the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, it is hard to consider it a strategic success.[6] It should be noted that this trade-off between operational and strategic consequences was not unique to Operation Ajax. The 1973 Chilean Coup and the Contras of the '80s shared similar strategic complications and long-term consequences.

Second, U.S.-sponsored military coups have often led to mobilized and unified opposition "social movements" like those found in Latin America, which still maintain a multitude of policies that are not entirely compatible with U.S. national interest. In other words, military coups have resulted in unfavorable long-term geopolitical consequences.[7]

Third, the prevailing approaches often result in diminished indigenous legitimacy. Transitional governments do not fully consider the role of indigenous networks or broad popular support, and are often marred with excessive political repression, which in turn further undermines the legitimacy of UW partners. As the U.S. partners are rarely based on a popular constituency, it requires the U.S. to provide costly financial and political support.[8]

Social Movement Approach

Now consider the social-movement approach to UW. When applied to UW, it has a number of unique operational and strategic advantages. Empirically, a great many successful UW campaigns are characterized by their active mobilization of social-movement components. Hamas and Hezbollah are prime examples of this advantage. How does a social movement enhance the robustness of an irregular force? First, it can enhance the legitimacy of an indigenous movement by heavily leveraging and incorporating existing organic social infrastructure. Second, it is ideally equipped to accomplish "bloc recruitment"[9] because it relies on existing networks. Bloc recruitment is a process where a single recruiter can effectively mobilize existing groups bound by trust and solidarity as opposed to having to convince individuals to join his cause.[10] Third, because it relies on locally influential networks, it can
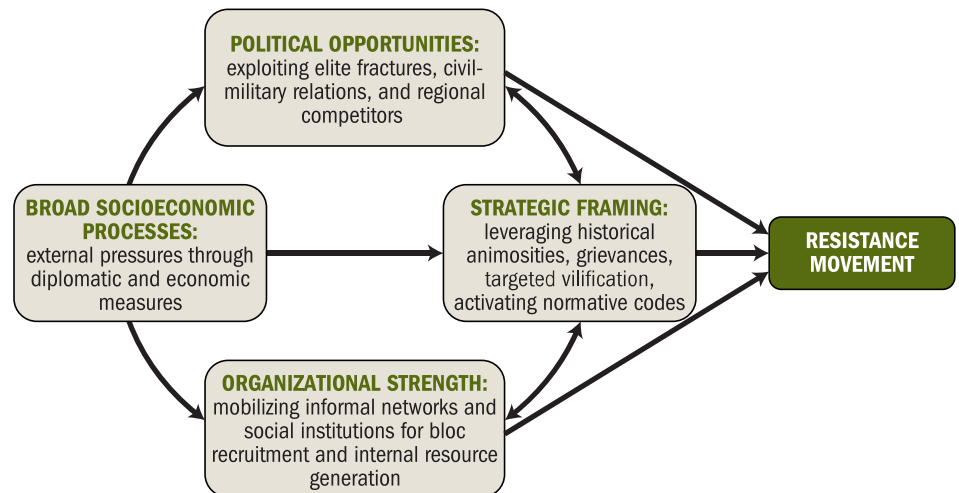
promote a more institutionalized form of demobilization at Phase 7 of UW. In turn, this transitional government can easily be tasked with provision of essential services fostering post-conflict stability. A great example of this transformation is the Solidarity movement in Poland that orchestrated a relatively stable political transition from the former Communist regime. Finally, because social-embedded partners rely on local reputations to maintain and increase their influence, they are unlikely to divulge their collaboration with the U.S.

The Solidarity Movement in Poland clearly illustrates these advantages. Initially, the free labor-union movement was secondary to the Catholic and student movements' central position in the composition of the opposition in the '70s and early '80s.[11] However, the free labor-union movement began to exert more influence during the early '70s. The Solidarity Movement was able to assume a central leadership role in the broad opposition field partly due to clandestine support from the U.S.[12] The former Director of Central Intelligence and former Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, states that the CIA was operationally active in Poland during the '80s providing clandestine support to Solidarity such as printing equipment and other means of communication to the underground.[13] Incidentally, The CIA's support in money and equipment to the Polish underground to set up a "clandestine television" station was partially responsible for Solidarity's increasing centrality in the narrative of the opposition movement.[14][15][16] In many ways, the

Solidarity Movement was a successful UW campaign both operationally and strategically. Operationally, Solidarity was critical in bringing down the Polish Communist government with a smooth transition to a democracy. Strategically, Poland has been a staunch ally of the U.S. since the collapse of the Soviet Block without the typical negative consequences associated with U.S.-sponsored insurgencies or coups.

UW planners should also take into account a few inherent drawbacks when using social-movement theory to condition a UW campaign. First, special considerations must be made for security. When utilizing indigenous social groups, security can be compromised due to the internal diversity that is characteristic of a mass movement. Second, because of this internal diversity and the necessity of a coalition to foment a robust resistance movement, political outcomes are not always controllable despite historical support. In addition, the resistance narrative can lack coherence due to the need to keep heterogeneous groups in a broad coalition. Operationally, it necessitates that a great deal of information about local cultures and social networks is not only known, but more importantly understood.

Operationalizing the Social Movement Approach

Social-movement theory is predicated upon the notion that four broad factors are often highly correlated with successful resistance or insurgent movements: broad socio-economic processes, political opportunity, indigenous organizational strength and insurgent consciousness.[20] Broad

socio-economic processes include systemic strains that can either weaken or facture an existing political authority.[21] Some of the examples found include economic downturns, poverty, ethnic division, demographic pressures and associated issues. Figure 3 illustrates how social-movement theory can be synthesized with UW.[22]

Applied to UW, these broad socio-economic conditions can create a permissive environment to elevate the perception of injustice and the necessity of rebellion. In turn, once an unstable economic condition is established, it can aid the formation of insurgent consciousness that can be utilized to unite a variety of opposition groups. Targeted sanctions that can undermine the regime's ability to placate popular grievances can also induce a permissive environment for rebellion. When the regime's resources are reduced, it can also activate latent elite fractures.

People Power Movement in the Philippines, where the Philippine Army decided to stay neutral and refused to fire on protesters. These examples highlight how fractured civil-military relations can modulate the pace and scope of resistance movements.

How does a UW planner utilize political opportunities? First, one must start by identifying potential factions within the target regime and its social constituencies. Having defectors from the target regime can substantially increase the perceived success of collective action and weakness of the governing elite. For instance, continued defections from the Syrian regime have provided the Free Syrian Army with much needed internal and external support despite its military setbacks.

Mobilizing structures are defined as formal and informal collective vehicles through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.[26] Examples include influential

for providing ideological and operational guidance.[29] They can promote unified and coordinated action toward a common goal. While centralized leadership can be effective for efficient coordination and control, it is also vulnerable to decapitation. Many centralized movements quickly succumbed to leadership targeting such as the Shining Path in Peru and Aum Shinrikyo in Japan.[30] On the other hand, decentralized leadership often characterized by a council or Shura structure obfuscates individual leaders and deflects state repression.[31 32]

Connective tissues are the channels through which leadership structures communicate, coordinate and control grassroots networks.[33] This middle layer is what completes a cluster-bridge configuration.[34] This specific configuration is characterized by compartmentalized operational cells, redundant connective tissues and decentralized leadership.

> "Incorporating social-movement theory with UW introduces doctrinal modifications and extensions that may require a new way of thinking about pursuing disruption, coercion and regime change."

Political opportunities are defined as consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent signals to social or political actors that either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form collective action.[23] They represent broader sets of political constraints and opportunities that condition the cost/benefit calculation of collective action. Some of their indicators include elite cohesion/division, influential dissidents, repression capacity and civil-military relations, which are all good example of political opportunities.[24]

For instance, the fractured relations between Egyptian President Mubarak and the Egyptian army were a critical point that emboldened and galvanized the opposition movement. When the Egyptian army declared its neutrality to the uprising, it dramatically increased the breadth of mobilization as the possibility of a brutal crackdown was diminished.[25] A similarly fractured civil-military relationship was also critical to the success of the 1986

dissidents, social networks, traditional networks, social institutions, social media, etc.

Key functions of mobilizing structures include recruitment, internal resource generation (human, information and material), connectivity and coordination, and control mechanisms. For instance, it is no coincidence that the church played a critical role in the Civil Rights Movement and the mosque in the Islamist movements. Even when Mubarak tried to shut down social media, the protesters regrouped after Friday prayer at numerous religious institutions.[27]

An effective resistance network is typically characterized by three layers: grassroots, leadership structures and connective tissues.[28] Grass-roots networks represent how the movement is organized at the point of contact against its target regime. Typically, the more socially embedded, the more resilient they tend to be. This is where strong ties such as kinship, tribe and friendship networks often accelerate the pace of mobilization. Leadership structures are responsible

Applied to UW, the benefits of the cluster-bridge configuration are numerous. Compartmentalization can enhance deniability and trust at the operational level, which can minimize the risk of exposure for the U.S. Redundant brokers with access to functionally diverse networks can provide robust logistical support by using informal networks of trade or generating resources internally.[35] In short, the cluster-bridge configuration can enhance the sustainability as well as security of UW campaigns.

Strategic framing or cognitive liberation is defined as the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understanding of the world and of themselves that legitimize and motivate collective action.[36] A good insurgent narrative has three core frames: diagnostic, prognostic and motivational.[37] Diagnostic frames elevate individual grievances into a systemic failure and identify whom to blame. Targeted vilification is a common practice for diagnostic framing.[38] Prognostic frames suggest the way forward

and desired forms of action to rectify the identified problem. Typically, an effective prognostic frame stems from some success or glory experienced in the past in order to suggest repeatability and achievability.[39] It is no surprise that the Taliban call themselves Mujahidin, thereby invoking the defeat of the Soviet occupation in the '80s.

Motivational frames compel individuals to participate in collective action.[40] Another essential task for strategic framing is alignment where key frames are intentionally linked with other groups in order to broaden the breadth of resistance movements.[41] Typically, a political issue will be nested in a broader norm such as human rights, nationalism and religion in order to connect with a greater variety of groups. Naturally, the type of frame alignment will depend on what "master" or "identity" frames are locally available.[42 43] This is why a great many insurgent groups use religion to appear broader than their political goals.[44]

How does strategic framing aid UW campaigns? A sound narrative that synthesizes all three frames can help UW planners nest its objectives in locally resonating frames. Economic hardship can be framed as a failure of governance. In Tunisia, street vendor Bouazizi's self-immolation was framed as a damning testament to Ben Ali's corruption and cronyism.[45] Targeted vilification helps unite different factions into a broad coalition. In Tunisia, the main goal was blaming Ben Ali's cronyism for the deteriorating economy. In Egypt, it was ousting Mubarak. It was Gadhafi in Libya. In short, most successful resistance movements rely on some sort of targeted vilification to broaden opposition movements and marginalize regime sympathizers. Moreover, acts of resistance can be framed as a social or religious obligation. The myth of martyrdom is a good example of a powerful motivational frame.[46] Overthrowing a regime can be framed as restoring the country's rightful place in history. For instance, economic difficulties and political grievances in Iran can be captured in a narrative that the true intent of the revolution has been betrayed by Ali Khamenei's personal greed for power.

Conclusion

In light of the Arab Spring, social-movement theory can indeed enhance the
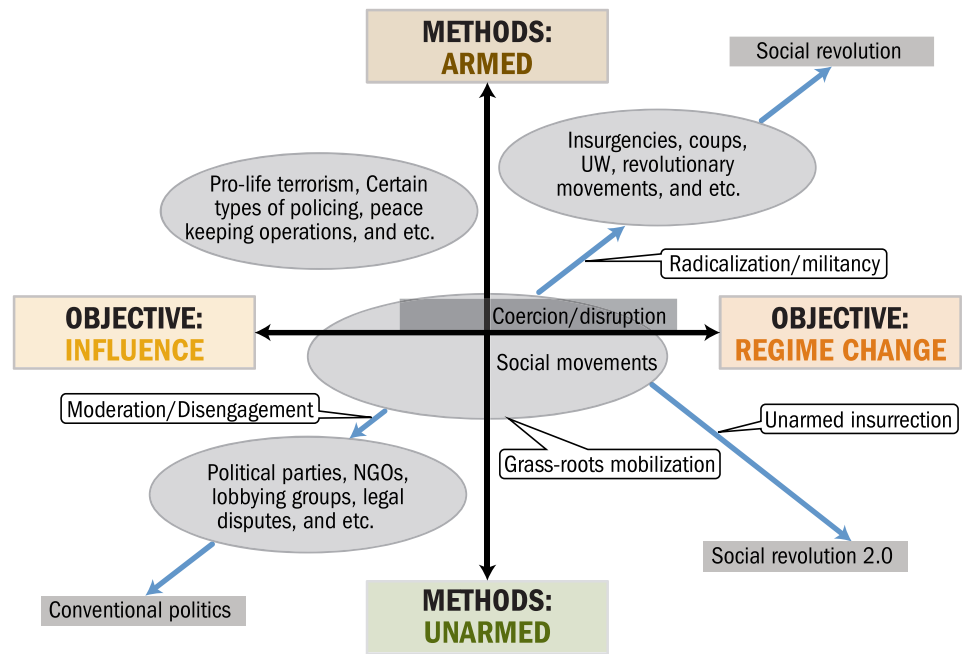
FIGURE 4 Operational Flexibility of Social Movement Model.

operational flexibility of UW by leveraging existing social-movement networks and dissident narratives. It should be noted that the social-movement approach should be applied only when two conditions are met. First, the approach is relevant when some resistance movements already exists. Starting a new movement is inherently costly both in terms of time and money. This explains why successful movements tend to emerge from pre-existing social networks.[47] Second, the social-movement approach becomes relevant when existing social movements are sufficiently malleable with UW objectives. Put differently, cultural knowledge and understanding normative dynamics is critical for the social-movement approach to work. For instance, al-Qaeda in Iraq eventually lost popular support despite exploiting indigenous social networks and tribal relations because it failed to align its strategic and cultural framing with that of the al-Anbar tribes.[48]

Figure 4 illustrates the operational flexibility of the social-movement approach. Once embedded in a broad social movement, a UW campaign can modulate its objectives and methods depending on how the regime responds. In fact, this is precisely how Hezbollah has maintained its popular support. When attacked militarily, it quickly turned itself into a resistance irregular force during the 2006 Lebanon War (radicalization/militancy).[49] It also

relied on mass-mobilization to put political pressures on Israel to withdraw (unarmed insurrection).[50] When faced with economic blockades, it mobilized its social-movement organizations to collect and distribute resources and essential services (grass-roots mobilization).[51] When presented with political opportunities, it quickly seized them through its social organizations to gain access to the electoral process (moderation).[52] Integrating this type of operational flexibility into a UW campaign can yield tremendous strategic benefits.

Incorporating social-movement theory with UW introduces doctrinal modifications and extensions that may require a new way of thinking about pursuing disruption, coercion and regime change. However, if we approach UW as a strategic tool, long-term consequences must be taken into account. It is precisely the operational flexibility and grass-roots foundation of the social-movement approach that can afford UW such strategic benefits. In short, social-movement theory can enhance the strategic flexibility and social support of UW by tapping into existing political fractures, informal social networks and locally resonating frames. **SW**

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Notes

1. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 4. The civil rights movement, the tea party movement, the Nazi movement, the Tiananmen Square movement, and the Arab Spring are well known examples of social movements.

2. Theda Skocpol, *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 5.

3. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-05, 18 April 2011.

4. Indigenous regime changes without social movements from recent history include the 1979 military coup in South Korea, the 1988 coup in Burma, and the 1991 Thai coup (Area C).

5. For a detailed discussion on the strategic consequences of Operation Ajax, see Malcolm Bryne, *Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran*, Syracuse University Press, 2004.

6. Ibid

7. Ironically, it is the counter-movements to U.S. sponsored regime changes that enjoy a long-term legitimacy benefit.

8. One of the benefits of the prevailing model is security as it often worked through "tight" homogenous networks and hierarchical organizations such as military units or political associations.

9. For a detailed discussion on block recruitment, see Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict and Social Movement*, Prentice Hall, 1973, p. 125.

10. Mario Diani & Doug McAdam, eds., Social Movements and Networks: *Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford University Press, 2003. Most effective resistance movements have relied on this type of recruitment for rapid mobilization and expansion.

11. Maryjane Osa, "Networks in Opposition: Linking Organizations through Activist in the Polish People's Republic," *Social Movements and Networks*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

12. Bob Woodward, Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA, 1981-1987, Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1987, pp. 372-373.

13. Robert Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War*, Simon & Schuster Publications, 2006, p. 450.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid., p. 451. In one instance, Walesa's people used the station to "take over the airwaves [...], overriding Warsaw's evening television news on the eve of the Pope's visit with a message urging Solidarity activists to participate in public demonstrations."

16. Ibid., p. 450. The source of the assistance was not revealed to Solidarity operatives.

17. For a detailed account of how the IRGC has controlled Hezbollah, see Robert Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, Random House, 2008.

18. Ibid.

19. For a detailed analysis of how Hezbollah has managed to garner popular support can be found in Reuven Erlich and Yoram Kahati, *Hezbollah as a Case Study of the Battle for Hearts and Minds*, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, June 2007. On how Hezbollah utilized networks to overcome its military inferiority to the Israeli Defense Forces, see John Arquilla, "It Takes a Network: On Countering Terrorism While Reforming the Military," Testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, presented 18 September 2008.

20. Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 1930-1970, University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp. 36-49.

21. Ibid., pp. 50-52.

22. This figure is modified from Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency*, 1930-1970, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 51.

23. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 9-11

24. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 76-82.

25. The ongoing crisis in Syria can be partially attributed to the loyalty of the Syrian Army to Assad.

26. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 3.

27. Stefaan Walgrave et al, "Multiple Engagements and Network Bridging in Contentious Politics: Digital Media Use of Protest Participants," *Mobilization*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2011, pp. 317-320. While social media was heralded as a new form of collective action during the Arab Spring, recent research indicates that virtual coordination is effective only when combined with physical interaction among core activists in order to accelerate the pace of mobilization

28. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, Chapter 8, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

29. Michael Freeman, "The Headless Horseman: A Theoretical and Strategic Assessment of Leadership Targeting," *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, Vol. 30, 2010.

30. Ibid.

31. It is no coincidence that Hamas and Hezbollah maintain a decentralized leadership structure in order to deflect relentless Israeli leadership targeting.

32. For a detailed discussion on effects of leadership targeting, see Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," Security Studies, Vol. 18, 2009.

33. Shin-Kap Han, "The Other Ride of Paul Revere: The Brokerage Role in the Making of the American Revolution," *Mobilization*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2009.

34. Ibid.

35. Betweenness centrality measures the degree to which an actor is on the path that connects structurally separate networks. Brokers often have a high degree of betweenness centrality that can mediate relationships between different groups. Closeness centrality measures the distance of an actor to all other nodes in a network. The shorter the average path, the higher the closeness centrality. For a more detailed discussion of network centrality, see Christopher Ansell, "Community Embeddedness and Collaborative Governance in the San Francisco Bay Area Environmental Movement," *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. 125-127.

36. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, eds., Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 261-262.

37. David Snow and Robert Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1, 1988.

38. Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Framing Jihad: Intramovement Framing Contests and al-Qaeda's Struggle for Sacred Authority," *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 49, 2004.

39. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer*, Harper & Row, 1951, pp. 73-77.

40. David Snow and Robert Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participation Mobilization," *International Social Movement Research*, Vol. 1, 1988.

41. David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 1986.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid. In the Civil Rights Movement, political enfranchisement was nested in civil rights in order to attract more white progressives.

44. David Snow and Scott C. Byrd, "Ideology, Framing, and Islamic Terrorist Movements," *Mobilization*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2007.

45. For a detailed account of the Tunisian Uprising, see "Popular Protest in North Africa and the Middle East (IV): Tunisia's Way," ICG Middle East/North Africa Report No. 126, April 28, 2012.

46. Mohammed M. Hafez, *Suicide Bombers in Iraq*, Institute of Peace Press, 2007, pp. 118-138

47. Helmut Anheier, "Movement Development and Organizational Networks: The Role of 'Single Members' in the German Nazi Party, 1925-30," *Social Movements and Networks, Oxford University Press*, 2003.

48. Andrew Phillips, "How al Qaeda Lost Iraq," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1, 2009.

49. Ron Schleifer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah Versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2006, p. 10.

50. Bilai Saab and Nicholas Blanford, "Seeing Red Along the Blue Line," *Foreign Policy*, July 29, 2011.

51. Casey L. Addis and Christopher M. Blanchard, "Hezbollah: Background and Issues for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, January 3, 2011, p. 9.

52. For a detailed analysis of Hezbollah's electoral strategies, see Eyal Zisser, "Hizballah in Lebanon: At the Crossroads," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1997.